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SUBJECT: TOGO'S UFC LEADER GILCHRIST OLYMPPIO CONTINUES HIS
QUEST FOR THE PRESIDENCY

REF: LOME 401 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Classified By: Andrew Young, Political Counselor, reason
1.4 (b and d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Meeting with us on October 26, Togolese opposition leader Gilchrist Olympio was relaxed and at ease as he discussed his electoral prospects. He said he had overcome several procedural obstacles and was ready to campaign actively for the presidency. He asked that the U.S., along with other concerned countries, provide election observers and to pressure the Faure government into holding clean elections, which he was convinced he could and would win. Still, despite a generally optimistic outlook, Olympio at every turn noted the Faure government's ability and willingness to steal the election, no matter what Faure's opponents might do, how well they might run, or whatever pressures the international community might place on the regime. While Olympio seemed more energetic and alert than we have seen him in the past, the question remains as to how much real appeal he has for today's Togolese voters and the extent to which they identify with him as their desired leader. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) During a two-plus hour meeting on October 26 with Pol/AF-watcher and Embassy AF-assistant, Gilchrist Olympio, the head of Togo's Union Forces of Change (UFC) party, expressed his determination to run in the February Presidential election. Sitting in his opulent Paris apartment, accompanied by his political aide, Isaac Tchiakpe, Olympio barely acknowledged the existence of other opposition parties, and claimed that the UFC is the largest party in the country, "by far."

FAURE WILL ACT TO UNDERMINE HONEST ELECTIONS

13. (C) Olympio expressed determination to not only run in the upcoming elections, but to also deploy a nation-wide party organization capable of monitoring the vote, verifying the results, and reliably sharing this information from the field. He also wondered if the U.S. couldn't help fund this effort, particularly by providing satellite phones and computer equipment. According to Olympio, President Faure's government, as it did for the 2005 vote, will not only attempt to cheat on the results, but will also attempt to limit the ability of the opposition or outside observers to monitor the election. Olympio claims that in 2005, the government shut down cell phone networks, including for text messages, and also blocked access to the internet. Olympio's UFC party had established a communications center in Ghana, but, in Olympio's telling, at the urging of Faure, local Ghanaian officials also shut down communications near the Togo border, effectively thwarting the UFC's efforts.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD PAY ATTENTION; HELP

14. (C) Olympio stated that "it is clear the government will commit fraud, it's just a question of if it will be

successful enough to again steal the election." For this reason, he hopes the international community will provide a robust election observer mission, and he hopes the U.S., in particular, will be involved, adding that he has already been in touch with the Carter Center. He was dismissive of the capacity (and political will) of the African Union and ECOWAS to play a positive role in assuring a fair result.

15. (C) In Olympio's calculation, the UFC candidate should dominate the vote. When asked how he can be so certain, he claimed that the UFC is the biggest party "by far" in Togo, and also cited the example of the most recent legislative elections where the UFC won an equal share of the popular vote, "without even campaigning hard," although its voting strength did not translate into a commensurate share of seats because of effective GOT gerrymandering. Olympio did not refer to the internal friction within the opposition noted in reftel; throughout the meeting he spoke of the "opposition" and his own candidacy as they were one and the same.

16. (C) In Olympio's view, if the EU and the U.S. "assure the vote result is honest," Togo will have a truly democratic transition for the first time. He demurred from answering questions about how far Faure would go to assure his own victory, or how the UFC would respond if it felt again cheated by the outcome. After the meeting, Olympio's political aide, Isaac Tchiakpe, told us he would like to discuss further the "what ifs."

"THAT BOY" IS DESTROYING OUR COUNTRY

17. (C) President Faure was not mentioned by name during the
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meeting -- Olympio referred to him, as is his habit, only as "that boy", as in, "that small boy is destroying our country." In particular, Olympio criticized the current government for massive corruption and political patronage, claiming that the Faure is now driving a Rolls Royce, while his entourage travels in Hummers. Togo's economy is collapsing, poverty is increasing, and ethnic tensions are high, Olympio told us.

"I'M GOING TO TOGO AND I MIGHT NOT COME BACK"

18. (C) Olympio plans to travel to Togo soon, perhaps stopping first at his home in Ghana. Though the official campaign is limited to two weeks, Olympio plans to stay in Togo until the formal election season. In addition to becoming more visible in his country, Olympio also wants to be involved in the technical and logistic aspects of the election. He asserted that the parties are still negotiating whether the president will be chosen in one or two rounds. Olympio claimed he also needs to establish security for himself and his party's leaders and added that he might not be back in Paris "for a long time" and also hinted that the government could "again" try to kill him. Olympio spoke favorably of Ambassador Hawkins and said he hoped to meet with her shortly after he arrived in Lome.

19. (C) Olympio said that he had overcome three looming problems via negotiations with the GOT: whether he was eligible to run because of his dual nationality status (his Ghanaian citizenship), his residency status, and his lack of tax debt to the GOT. He said that these points were all successfully negotiated in his favor, clearing procedural obstacles to his candidacy.

CHINESE AID AND VOLUNTEERS TO TOGO

110. (C) When asked about China's involvement in Togo, and if the Chinese were likely supporting Faure, Olympio said that China was comfortable with the current government and was looking to expand its presence in Togo. In particular, China is eyeing opportunities for exploiting the country's phosphates deposits, and Olympio admitted that the country

needs help with this because the remaining resource requires significant investment and technical ability. Alluding to a "Chinese Peace Corps," Olympio added that Togo is one of the first African countries to receive Chinese "young volunteers," apparently 20 at first, with 17 in Lome and three in Kara.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Olympio was relaxed, seemingly in good spirits, and a bit more energized than we have seen him in the past, perhaps due to the prospect of his near-certain participation in an election that is likely to be conducted in an atmosphere more favorable than any other Togolese election since independence. Yet, he displayed a mindset that we have seen on several occasions in the past -- a certain resignation that the Faure government, like the Eyadema government, is willing and able to use the powers of state to thwart Olympio's ambitions, and that he can only win if allowed to win. Thus, while he believes he can win, should win, and deserves to win, he is nonetheless subject to the will of the Faure government. So, even while making the most optimistic assessments, he would, in the next sentence, acknowledge the regime's relatively total control over what happens in Togo.

¶12. (C) Moreover, despite his personal quest to become Togo's leader, itself driven by the past, Olympio is handicapped by the fact that it is hard to imagine very many of today's voters in Togo identifying with this urbane, cosmopolitan elderly gentleman with roots in another era, who appears to have little in common with those whose votes he seeks. His status as opposition leader probably gains him far more votes than does his name and family history, or whatever personal or policy alternative he may offer to Togolese voters.

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